

'Leak' May Delay Official Airing of Antimissile System Start

President Johnson has ordered the Pentagon to begin construction of a defense system to guard against a small-scale missile attack.

News of the decision was relayed to key congressional leaders on Friday, and the initial administration plan was for Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to make the public announcement in a speech in San Francisco tomorrow afternoon.

Because word of the decision leaked to the press, the announcement may come at some other time, some sources said.

Ineffective In All-Out Attack

The defense, known in military jargon as a "thin antiballistic missile (ABM) system," is designed to ward off an attack in the 1970s from Red

China, and to aid in guarding cities and missile sites from an "accidental" Russian attack.

As currently conceived, the "thin ABM" system would be largely ineffective against an all-out Soviet missile attack.

Thus, it is expected that supporters of the decision to deploy the "thin ABM" system will next push for construction of a nation-wide defense to guard also against a Soviet onslaught.

\$5 Billion System

The "thin system" is estimated to cost about \$5 billion, and take five years to build. Money for the first year's work—\$700 million—already is in the current Defense Department budget. Cost for a "big system" is estimated to run as high as \$70 billion.

The Pentagon has been ready

for months to start work on deploying the system, but was awaiting a final decision from President Johnson.

The decision drew praise from two influential senators and criticism from another.

Sen. Richard B. Russell, D-Ga., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said "It's been the best news the American people have had for years."

Russell commented that a "thin" system "isn't adequate protection, but it will give us a better idea of the cost of a big one."

He said he doubts a major system would cost "anything like the \$40 billion" talked about.

Chairman John C. Stennis, D-Miss., of the Senate Military Preparedness Subcommittee also praised the decision.

Noting that the system would be aimed at defending against a Communist Chinese attack, Stennis said: "I think China has made very rapid strides in nuclear weapons and that it won't be very long before she's capable to deliver them."

But Sen. J. William Fulbright, D-Ark., said that the administration plan could produce "very dangerous counter measures by the Soviet Union."

"Very Debatable"

"I am very dubious of the plan," the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee told United Press International. He proposed congressional hearings on the move.

"As a political decision, I think it is very regrettable," Fulbright said. "Even though the system is reported to be mainly a defense against a

potential Chinese attack, the U.S. decision could still cause the Soviet Union to further step up the arms race."

Freeze Efforts Have Failed

Johnson had sought to avoid deployment by getting the Russians to agree to a mutual freeze, not only on an ABM system but on offensive missiles as well. But efforts to engage Moscow in negotiations have so far failed.

Just two weeks ago, with a decision to deploy apparently imminent, Johnson sent a message to U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn E. Thompson in Moscow instructing him to tell Soviet officials that unless talks began soon, deployment would begin on the "thin system."

The Russians have deployed an ABM defense around Mos-

cow, and have started work on a network of sites which may be a large scale ABM system, or, as some intelligence officers believe, simply an anti-aircraft defense.

There has been strong pressure from such senators as Henry M. Jackson, D-Wash., chairman of the subcommittee on military application of atomic energy, to begin work on ABM deployment. Billions of dollars have been spent on the research and development of the current Nike-X system—the descendant of the old Nike system. Jackson's committee will begin hearing on ABMs in a few weeks.

2 Types of Missiles

As designed now, the Nike-X consists of two types of missiles—one, the Spartan, would go

hundreds of miles out to meet incoming intercontinental missiles. The other, the Sprint, would go straight up to hit the missiles that had gone through.

No ABM system is perfect, and McNamara has estimated that even with a system, as many as 50 million people could perish from a Chinese attack in the 1970s.

The Chinese, who first tested a nuclear device in 1964, have started work on a missile system.

The administration has been reluctant to deploy an ABM system for fear that it would touch off a new round in the arms race. Secretary of State Dean Rusk has argued that if both Russia and America have ABMs this will lead to new pressures to develop better offensive weapons, and so on.